



## A partnership of the public and private sector proves successful

The major countries and cities of the world have been facing the problems of a growing homeless population for the last forty years, and in the last five, Aruba has found that this problem has also come to our “One Happy Island.” In particular, those that have businesses in the areas where the homeless population has most proliferated have noticed an escalation of the unwanted incidents that such population will bring, and they have formed a partnership with Aruba’s police force, and other organizations such as the Aruba Tourism Authority and the government’s anti-drug task force. The results of an all day conference/workshop held on August 23 at the Renaissance Convention Center with the official government departments and over sixty NGO representatives were presented during a press conference held on Friday afternoon, September 1 in Oranjestad. Representing the concerned parties were Audrey Croes-Lacle and Frank Tieleman of MAMBO and Deputy Commissioner of Police Trudy Hassell.

The issues discussed were how to solve the problem with respect to the human rights of all involved, not only the homeless, but the community that is affected by their anti-social actions. Organizers expressed how encouraged they were by the unity with which the various parties met and are examining the growing problem with a sincere desire to a solution. “Egos were put aside to cooperate and work for a realistic solution,” commented Ms. Croes-Lacle, “which is highly commendable.”

The initial conference split the attendees into seven teams that examined the history of the issue, made observations and evaluations, and then conclusions and suggestions for a solution. The seven reports that they filed will be examined and edited for redundancy, and incorporated in to one plan for a resolution, which will be presented to the authorities.

“The solution of this issue will take the cooperation of all the community and each individual,” is the feeling of the organizers, represented by Ms. Croes-Lacle. “We are looking to set short, medium, and long term goals, but much of it has to begin in the home, with families paying more attention to their children, what they are doing, and the possibility of substance abuse. This is a start, and where we think much of the problem lies in regards to young people that become homeless. Of course, many factors contribute to a person not being able to fit into society; dementia, financial woes and many of the same factors that produce homeless in other places. However, seeing that children are raised properly with love and strong values will certainly help to solve a large part of the problem.”

Deputy Commissioner Hassell termed this cooperation of the private and public sector as “historic, but only a beginning. We are very happy with how many are willing to donate their time and effort into seeing a successful solution to a growing problem that has escalated in the last few years, something that the island had never seen before, so must look toward the steps that other places are taking to accomplish this.” Towards this end, representatives went to Curacao to study how they are working to handle their homeless population, and hope to visit other islands and share information with their authorities. Their main goal now is to complete their report and to charge the local population to “wake up and smell the coffee.”